

Washington, D.C. — Yesterday the House narrowly rejected an amendment by Congressman Blumenauer (D-Ore.) to the fiscal year 2004 Interior Appropriations bill, to protect the Lower Klamath and Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuges, located on the border of Oregon and California. As the House was voting, a federal district court judge rejected the Bush Administration's 10-year water plan for the Klamath River, finding that it violates the Endangered Species Act and puts the Klamath salmon dangerously at risk.

Congressman Blumenauer offered the following statement:

"Yesterday the House of Representatives, by a narrow vote, ducked the issue of water demand in the Klamath Basin. And, then the conflict was thrown right back into our laps, in minutes, with a court ruling that tossed out the Bush approach to managing water. The answer is not more litigation. It is not more studies. It is to reduce water demand in the basin.

"We must fix the basic problem: the federal government has promised more water than nature can deliver. Luckily there are things we can do. We can reduce water-intensive agriculture, which will save billions of gallons of water. We had a strong vote in the House yesterday on this approach and there is great interest within the Senate. The federal government can and should provide money to buy out farmers who want to sell their land. Most importantly, we should stop pretending that we can meet our environmental obligations by blaming someone else.

"Lack of water in the Klamath Basin is not a plot. It is a reality. We must stop this collective denial. Every year that there is a drought, every time we witness a massive fish kill, every judicial ruling finding the federal government is not meeting its responsibilities is a signal that we ought to be taking these simple commonsense approaches."